

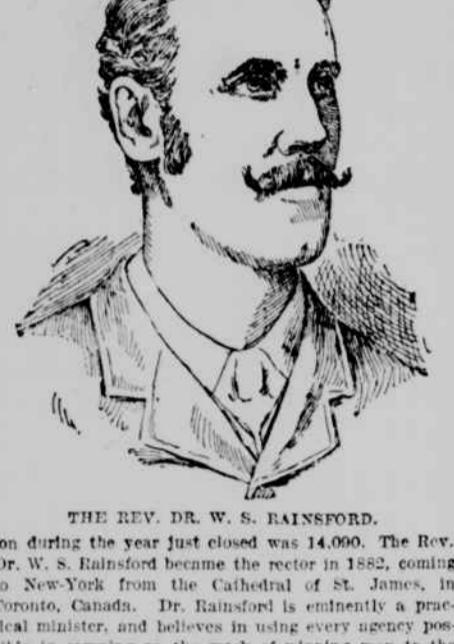
SERMONS WORTH HEARING.

IV.

SOCIETY'S CLAIMS ON CHRISTIANS.

A DISCOURSE BY THE REV. DR. W. S. RAINSFORD,
THE RECTOR OF ST. GEORGE'S PROTESTANT
EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

The year-book of St. George's Protestant Episcopal Church, at Stuyvesant Square, is a commentary upon the vast work of the church. It requires 250 pages to tell of the numerous branches of work carried on by the rector, the Rev. Dr. W. S. Rainsford, and his assistants. There are eight building societies scattered about the city, including the Seaside Cottage at Eastern-ave., Rockaway Park, L. I. Next to Trinity, St. George's is the oldest Protestant Episcopal parish in this city. The number of regular communicants for the year is about 1,500, while the number of communicants whose names appear on the church books for the year is 2,797. The total number taking commun-



THE REV. DR. W. S. RAINSFORD.

ion during the year just closed was 14,000. The Rev. Dr. W. S. Rainsford became the rector in 1882, coming to New-York from the Cathedral of St. James, in Toronto, Canada. Dr. Rainsford is eminently a practical minister, and believes in using every agency possible in carrying on the work of winning men to the Master.

The sermon yesterday morning was upon the claims of society upon Christians, the text being taken from II Kings, II, 19-22. Dr. Rainsford said in substance:

"Here we have the claim of the community on the prophet, and the prophet's answer to that claim. Both, it seems to me, suggest to us vividly the circumstances, claims and duties of our times—society's claims on us, and our best answer to those claims."

The distinctive feature of our religious life in these United States is that an individual, an individual in perhaps more vigorous and human ways more complete than any that the history of our race has yet afforded. All things have combined to develop the individual. The result of this is that we wait on the Lord, and trust in him as our glove fits the hand, and each hand must have its own glove. Hence our religious life has also been individualistic.



ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH.

Geographically we are individuals. The fitness of our soil, climate, distance from the failure of man, when man began to be aware of the limitations of his condition in Europe, beckoned him to an enlargement of individual energy, offered him rich rewards to the bold and visioned to win them as had never been offered man before.

Politically our institutions predispose us to individualism. The great and wise men who laid the foundations of our country were all individualists. They were men of those forms of government in Europe that to them represented repression of the individual rights of mankind.

Thus it comes to pass that the bigness of our land, the bigness of our founders, and the timeliness of the discovery of a virgin continent all combined to give a hopeful start and large reward to the push, energy and courage of man. It is no exaggeration to say that what we see around us to-day is the effect of that individualism.

Instinctively I think most intelligent men feel this, and standing amazed at the wonderful results achieved, they are not prepared to give anything more than a very general assent to any theory that may be put forward that suggests that individualism is not a good but only a way of approach; is not a final end but one of the means to a great end. We Christians have for their object the vindication of God's laws and plans to men; and in that life and teaching we find, as we would expect to find, the stillest provision for individual development, and yet in the same life the clearest possible form of statement that this is not all. Survival itself is not the safety of the individual only or chiefly. It is the creation of a purified and stable social state, this society first purifying and then protecting the individual, and finally triumphing over him. He predicted, "How shall we then discharge our duty to the society and time in which we find ourselves?"

HOW TO DISCHARGE DUTY.

First I think we shall do so by recognizing the imperfection of the Christianity which these circumstances and times have specially tended to produce. The vast individual energy of our people moulds and profoundly influences, of course, the religious life of the people; and this life is at present too individualistic. It could not but be so. It works too hard for its own fame, and too much for its own law. It is hyperprotestant in short.

It develops in such a way as: "The first law of development is the law of self-preservation." No doubt it is the law in the organic world, but the law does not belong in its full application to barbarous times and incoherent civilizations. It is the law that gives claws and teeth to the tiger, and strong hands and feet to swine, but it fails to the ape. But surely the law that gives strength to the tiger is not lifted us at least to a point where we can see the beginnings of the working of some larger, higher law than this.

Protestant religions had their root idea in conscience. The sense of right and wrong, the failure of man, and offering its rich bonus to the industry of man, when man began to be aware of the limitations of his condition in Europe, beckoned him to an enlargement of individual energy, offered him rich rewards to the bold and visioned to win them as had never been offered man before.

Now, the simple fact is, that much of the popular and orthodox religion prevalent in our modern Protestantism is built only upon the basis of tradition. It lacks the true strength, and it suffers grievously from a want of adaptability. Not all the preaching or writing or persecuting or heresy trials of those who oppose it make it in comfortably or reasonably on the line of development.

Of course the rest of us for this is plain enough. Men's thoughts, instincts and aims are more and more consciously drawing them into more involved and complex social relations. The aim of every good man is to help his fellow-men. There is a desire to do well, more and more, for the sake of others. This is the law of aid to the overwhelmed than ever before. Men no longer willingly pass by the unfortunate who has even been beaten. These are the signs of the times, and even begin to affect our own country, and put him on the neck of every know how. And, instinctively, they feel that this is the best thing in them, the most religious action within them. They turn to us for help, and we are obliged to help them.

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